

Creepy thriller satisfies Halloween cravings

‘Echoes of the Dead’ is both mind-boggling and stomach-churning

Here’s a creepy thriller for your pre-Halloween reading: “Echoes of the Dead.”

This is the fourth in a series by Spencer Kope who, in addition to writing fiction about crime, also works as a crime analyst for the Whatcom County Sheriff’s Office in northernmost Washington state.

In this installment, Magnus “Steps” Craig returns as one-third of an elite Special Tracking Unit for the FBI. He and his colleagues, Special Agent Jimmy Donovan and intelligence analyst Diane Parker, are based at a nondescript hangar at the Bellingham airport, but the trio handles tough-to-crack cases around the country. (Their mordant private motto, “We save the ones we can,” reveals that they don’t always bat a thousand.)

The Special Tracking Unit gets a call from the director of the FBI who asks them to assist with a missing persons case in the Sierra Nevada. A California congressman and three of his high profile friends have disappeared without a trace while on their annual fishing trip.

Diane remains behind her computer in Bellingham to analyze data and feed her partners the leads she comes up with, while Steps and Jimmy travel south to do the physical tracking — along with tracking of another sort.

After a traumatic incident as a child, Steps acquired a type of synesthesia — he characterizes it as “a borderline neurotic relationship with colors” — in which he can read the aura of individuals, as well as the “shine” they leave behind.

But Steps and Jimmy have barely begun their on-the-ground search at the campsite where the missing men were last known to be, when the first dead body shows up — on a park bench in Bakersfield, more than an hour to the south.

They travel to the morgue to check it out, and discover that the corpse is not one of the men they are looking for, although it is wearing the clothes and carrying the ID of one of the missing men. The mystery doesn’t stop there. The body in the morgue had been dead and already buried by a local mortuary several

days before the congressman and his buddies left on their fishing trip.

As the team digs deeper, they discover that this is only the beginning of several perplexing turns in the case.

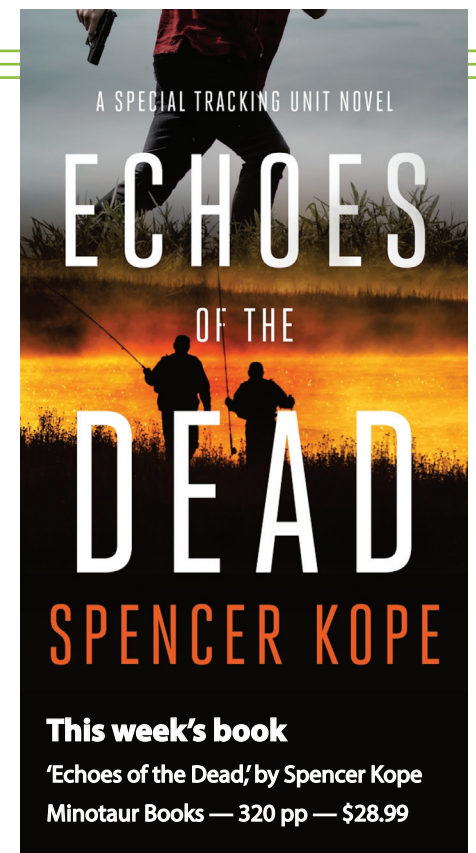
The author keeps the plot moving at a satisfying clip, but reader beware: “Echoes of the Dead” contains some truly gruesome scenes.

The scope of the villainy that takes place is both mind-boggling and stomach-churning. If readers take a step back from the relentless pace, they may have questions as to whether all that transpires could be sustained by the perpetrator the author supplies.

That said, the protagonists in this story are marvelous — from orange juice-swilling Steps, to the undersung but super-smart Diane, to the affable local sheriff. Steps’ inner musings (this story is told in the first person) are thoughtful, and the dialogue among characters is snappy and wry.

“Echoes of the Dead” won’t be for everyone, but does fill the bill for “ooky” Halloween reading.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focus-



This week's book

‘Echoes of the Dead,’ by Spencer Kope

Minotaur Books — 320 pp — \$28.99

ing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at barbaraLMcM@gmail.com

The Liberty Theatre Presents

RILEY DOWNING, BART BUDWIG, KASSI VALAZZA

Thursday, October 21, 2021,
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You may know Riley Downing from his work with acclaimed New Orleans combo the Deslondes, or perhaps from his similarly rootsy and wide-ranging catalog of songs with the Tumbleweeds - indeed, the Missouri-based singer-songwriter’s ability to set gripping, evocative narratives within soundscapes that weave together country, blues, folk, r&b, bluegrass, rock, soul and whatever else catches his ear is something that, once you hear it, is hard to shake free from. Same goes for that voice - deep, dusty and drawling, it’s an instrument that can stop you in your tracks with its character and expressiveness, as well as through Downing’s knack for laying out complex emotions in plainspoken, direct language.